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Amendments to the Claims

A listing of the claims, including Claims 20, 21 and 24 as currently amended, is set forth below.

1. (Original) A stylet-free catheter for insertion into a patient via a needle defining proximally a needle hub and distally a needle tip, comprising:

a catheter having a proximal end, a distal end, and a body connecting said proximal and distal ends;

aid body defining therealong a stiffening section of a predetermined length disposed a predetermined distance proximally of said distal end such that it is located generally about an area where said body approaches a needle hub when said distal end approaches a needle tip;

said stiffening section having a flexural stiffness at least twice that of the remainder of said body.

2. (Original) The catheter of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section has a length of about 5 cm.

3. (Original) The catheter of Claim 2 wherein said stiffening section is disposed from about 10 cm to about 15 cm proximally of said distal end.

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4. (Original) The catheter of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section extends from about 10 cm to about 15 cm proximally of said distal end.

5. (Original) The catheter of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section has a diameter not exceeding the diameter of the remainder of said body by more than about 0.15 mm.

6. (Original) The catheter of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section is formed of plastic tubing and a cured adhesive extending circumferentially about said plastic tubing to provide a stiffening coating.

7. (Original) The catheter of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating is non-tacky and wear-resistant.

8. (Original) The catheter of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating has a thickness not exceeding about 0.08 mm.

9. (Original) The catheter of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating extends in a substantially uniform thickness along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing.

10. (Original) The catheter of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating reinforces said plastic tubing of said stiffening section.

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11. (Original) The catheter of Claim 6 wherein said cured adhesive is UV-cured.

12. (Original) The catheter of Claim 11 wherein said cured adhesive is cured *in situ*.

13. (Original) The catheter of Claim 6 wherein said cured adhesive is UV-cured *in situ*.

14. (Original) The catheter of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section is formed of plastic tubing and a plastic sleeve heat-shrunk about said plastic tubing to stiffen said plastic tubing.

15. (Original) The catheter of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve is non-tacky and wear-resistant.

16. (Original) The catheter of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve has a thickness not exceeding 0.008 cm.

17. (Original) The catheter of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve extends in a substantially uniform thickness along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing.

18. (Original) The catheter of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve reinforces said plastic tubing of said stiffening section.

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19. (Original) The catheter of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve is polyethylene terephthalate (PET).

20. (Amended) A catheter for insertion into a patient via a needle defining proximally a needle hub and distally a needle tip, comprising:

a catheter having a proximal end, a distal end, and a body section connecting said proximal and distal ends;

said body defining therealong a stiffening section having a length of about 5 cm[[.]] and a diameter not exceeding the diameter of the remainder of said catheter body by more than about 0.15 mm;

said stiffening section being disposed from about 10 cm to about 15 cm- proximally of said distal end such that it is located generally about an area where said body approaches a needle hub when said distal end approaches a needle tip;

said stiffening section being formed of plastic tubing and an adhesive UV-cured *in situ* and extending circumferentially about said plastic tubing to provide a stiffening coating, said stiffening coating being non-tacky and wear-resistant and extending in a substantially uniform thickness not exceeding 0.08 mm along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing to reinforce said stiffening section;

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said stiffening section having a flexural strength at least twice times that of the remainder of said body.

21. (Amended) A catheter for insertion into a patient via a needle defining proximally a needle hub and distally a needle tip, comprising:

a catheter having a proximal end, a distal end, and a body section connecting said proximal and distal ends;

said body defining therealong a stiffening section having a length of about 7 cm[[.]] and a diameter not exceeding the diameter of the remainder of said catheter body by more than about 0.15 mm;

said stiffening section being disposed from about 10 cm to about 15 cm- proximally of said distal end such that it is located generally about an area where said body approaches a needle hub when said distal end approaches a needle tip;

said stiffening section being formed of plastic tubing and a plastic sleeve heat-shrunk about said plastic tubing to stiffen said plastic tubing;

said sleeve being non-tacky and wear-resistant and extending in a substantially uniform thickness not exceeding about 0.08 mm along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing to reinforce said stiffening section;

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said stiffening section having a flexural strength at least twice that of the remainder of said body.

22. (Original) In combination, the catheter of Claim 1 and a needle defining proximally a needle hub and distally a needle tip.

23. (Original) In combination, the catheter of Claim 21 and a needle defining proximally a needle hub and distally a needle tip.

24. (Currently Amended) In combination, the catheter of Claim ~~22~~ 20 and a needle defining proximally a needle hub and distally a needle tip.